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ABSTRACT

Three systems of appraisal of employees are described with reference to major characteristics and the most appropriate application context. The first system, the developmental action program, is designed to be utilized on a job allowing the employee considerable discretion in reaching the job's objectives, and perhaps some autonomy in establishing goals. The maintenance action program is a system of appraisal applicable to the average acceptable performer with low potential for promotion because of limited ability or motivation. Finally, the remedial action program is intended for administrative use with those clearly below standard, whose performance has consistently been unacceptable. Also discussed is the nature, amount, and frequency of feedback given to performers in the different appraisal systems. The author concludes that variations in appraisal are necessary because of multiple performance problems, performance histories, and work situations. (MPJ)

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APPRAISAL PURPOSE

AND THE

NATURE, AMOUNT, AND FREQUENCY OF FEEDBACK

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Appraisal Purpose and the Nature, Amount, and Frequency of Feedback

The purpose of this paper is to describe three appraisal programs or systems and to derive the implications of each for several dimensions of feedback provided to the performer.

The foundation for the paper rests on several inputs. First, criticisms of the typical appraisal system are abundant and these provide the stimulus for change and, hopefully, improvement (DeVries and McCall, 1976). Second, empirical evidence exists concerning the effects of performer participation and the effects of feedback to the performer suggesting that the nature, source, and frequency of feedback exert impacts upon employee motivation, satisfaction, and performance (Cummings, 1973; Greller and Herold, 1975; Brickman, et al., 1976; Herold and Greller, in press).

The paper describes three systems of appraisal as originally presented by Cummings and Schwab (1973). Each system is described with reference to its major characteristics and its most appropriate application context, i.e. nature of the task and employee performance history. Then the paper moves to an analysis and prescription of the dimensions of performance feedback that are most compatible with each of the three systems.

Three Systems of Appraisal

DeVries and McCall (1976) end their call for improvement in appraisal systems by suggesting that alternative systems be devised which will more clearly match the realities of organizational politics, hierarchy, and resources. They suggest that systems containing the following elements be devised: quantification plus subjective, clinical global judgments; multiple data sources and evaluators; group level outcomes pertaining to group performance; comparative or relative evaluations; clear superior

communications concerning the goals to be attained and procedures for measurement.

While these five suggestions for change are clearly needed, they need to be supplemented with an explicit awareness that organizational realities also contain differences in task technologies and employee performance histories. These differences, in turn, impact the appropriateness of any appraisal system or procedure. Thus, we need to assume a contingency posture toward designing, implementing, and evaluating employee appraisal. The following three systems are presented as a movement in this direction. They can be briefly summarized as in Figure 1.

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Insert Figure 1 here.
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Developmental Action Program

A developmental action program (DAP) is designed to be utilized on a job allowing the employee considerable discretion in obtaining the job's objectives and perhaps some autonomy in establishing the goals themselves. It further assumes that the employee is a high performer whose past performance has consistently shown an indication of potential for continued growth. The focus of such a program is on the present and future job development of the employee and on his personal growth.

Regardless of the specific form which a DAP may take, there are several crucial elements which should be included:

1. A goal clarification and commitment session;
2. Agreement between superior and subordinate upon standards and methods of performance measurement in each performance area;

3. Agreement upon what additional skills, technology, etc., are needed to attain goals;
4. Frequent review sessions with each individual operating under a DAP:
5. At frequent intervals, a complete recycling of the total DAP.

There appear to be three potentially desirable consequences of a DAP program from a subordinate's point of view. First, meaningful goals are developed for the subordinate; that is, goals with which he is personally identified because he has participated in establishing them. Second, there is some degree of self-control by the subordinate over the means or methods used in carrying out the job. Third, the performance of the job provides the employee with direct feedback about his performance. This can be referred to as cue feedback since the job design enables the performer to receive direct cues about the effectiveness of his performance from the job itself. These consequences should have positive motivational implications to the extent that they increase valent intrinsic outcomes and strengthen performance to intrinsic outcome instrumentalities.

Finally, as depicted in Figure 2, the results of a successfully implemented DAP can be either vertical promotion to a job of greater decision-making responsibility or a horizontal expansion of the job in the form of job enlargement or enrichment.

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Insert Figure 2 here.
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Maintenance Action Program

A maintenance action program (MAP) is applicable with the average, acceptable performer with low potential for vertical growth (promotion) because of ability or motivational constraints. MAP is also applicable for above-average performers working on jobs with low autonomy opportunities in terms of discretionary behavior on the job. The focus of this program of appraisal is on maintaining the present performances at acceptable levels.

In general, the procedure to be followed in a MAP consists of the following steps:

1. An assessment is made that the present level and direction of performance are acceptable and that little or no developmental potential exists. This judgment should be reached only after several appraisal intervals and decisions all point in the same direction.
2. Variable-interval reviews (timed in accordance with the completion of assigned tasks) or, less preferably, yearly reviews are conducted with the focus upon any deterioration of some aspect of performance below minimally acceptable levels.
3. Usually, a fairly close definition of procedures or methods to be followed in the job is presented by the superior.

The consequences for the subordinate of a MAP are slightly different than those in a DAP. First, the system is based on clearly defined and communicated goals. These goals frequently are defined by the superior

without the involvement of the subordinate. Second, the methods or means of carrying out the task are frequently imposed by either the technology of the job or the performer's superior. Third, the feedback to the performer regarding his performance is mediated through either his superior or a third party (e.g., a quality-control inspector or engineer). Thus, because the employee has limited potential and/or because the job is narrow in scope, a MAP approach to management and appraisal emphasizes fairly close direction and evaluation.

If performance is consistently good under a MAP system, then Figure 2 suggests the performer should be considered a candidate for a DAP. This may mean, of course, that the employee would have to be assigned to a job of broader scope. On the other hand, regression from a MAP to a remedial program is also possible, particularly if the employee's performance is below that which is minimally acceptable.

Remedial Action Program

A remedial action program (RAP) is intended for administrative use with clearly below-standard performers whose performance has consistently not been acceptable from an organizational point of view. The explicit focus of a RAP is on either performance improvement through progressively tighter controls or on termination of the below-standard performer.

In either case, a RAP will consist of the following general procedures:

1. Clear feedback to the individual about why the superior feels the performer has performance problems.
2. Frequent use of behavioral critical incidents to point out examples of poor and acceptable performance.
3. A highly specified, imposed program for corrective action, with performance measures and time perspectives clearly and formally established.

4. Monthly review sessions, more frequent if performance is continuing to deteriorate, with the focus of these sessions on the superior communicating to the employee how the superior feels the employee is doing against the program established in the previous step.
5. If performance increases, then go to longer time intervals of performance specifications and measurement; if continual improvement over a sustained period occurs, then transfer the individual to a MAP.
6. If performance does not improve or decreases even further, then establish a highly specified sequence of events in terms of activities, measurements, and short-time perspectives, with the explicit conclusion being termination if no performance improvements are shown; this frequently results in voluntary self-termination. A key element here is the employee's understanding that he has moved into this phase; therefore, explicit communications to this effect are crucial.

The consequences for the employee are quite distinct from those implied in the DAP and MAP approaches. First, the goals of performance are completely imposed upon the performer and are highly specific. Second, methods of work and procedures to be followed are also imposed and closely checked for obedience. Thus, there is a very low degree of self-control in the job for the performer. Third, feedback is frequent and detailed. Finally, the system involves the use of threatened or actual punishments in progressively more severe forms.

Of course, if performance improves and if this improvement is sustained, movement to a MAP should be made possible and encouraged.

Appraisal Programs and Dimensions of Feedback

Several recent findings concerning the impact of feedback on performer satisfaction and behavior provide a partial basis for the following comments In addition, the general logic of differentiation and contingency provides support for the complexity added by designing feedback systems to fit differences in organizational needs and employee performance patterns.

Greller and Herold (Greller and Herold, 1975; Greller, 1976; Herold and Greller, in press) have recently reported and reviewed several findings of importance to appraisal. Among the most significant is that self feedback tends to be positively correlated with job satisfaction and self-rated performance. Given that we know that individuals tend to over-evaluate their own performance, relative to others' evaluations of that same performance, under conditions of objectively low performance, then self evaluations would be most appropriate when persons are operating on or are ready for a DAP. Similarly, self evaluations would not be appropriate within a RAP system since it can be predicted that they would lead to inaccurately high evaluations,thereby limiting the corrective impact of the feedback. Greller (in press) also has found that feedback from others does not impact a performer's self-rating of his/her performance as strongly as imposed feedback from others. Thus, this evidence would suggest that we cannot be assured that self-correction or improvement will transpire when a low performer is given negative feedback by others. This implies that to make a RAP stick, the superior needs to provide specific, negative feedback and close follow-up.

Greller also has argued that performers actively seek positive information concerning performance expectations and evaluations of their performance. As Greller notes, "Regardless of how the information is obtained, the individual filters it in a self-enhancing manner. A complete study of feedback must not only look at the sources and content of feedback but at the factors which orient individuals toward that information" (Greller, 1976, p. 11).

With this evidence in mind and given the differential objectives of the three appraisal programs, what are the implications for the optimal nature, amount, and frequency of feedback. An attempt to summarize these is presented in Figure 3.

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Insert Figure 3 here.
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The three appraisal programs are arrayed horizontally and the dimensions of feedback are displayed vertically.

In the DAP, the temporal orientation is toward the future with an explicit emphasis on what needs to be done to develop the performer to the limits of his/her present capabilities and/or to expand those capabilities. Feedback should imply goals or areas of performance within which goals are appropriate for expansion. At least initially, the feedback will be primarily self-generated with the superior playing the role of organizational reality tester. The essence of feedback in the DAP is the implication that the performer's task is always expandable and that the job is to be seen and designed as an arena for self actualization.

Feedback in the DAP should be task-specific. It should focus on the opportunities available for performer growth and on the constraints presently inhibiting maximum performance as perceived by the performer. That is, what does the performer think could be done in the way of additional information, changes in technology, the nature of the work flow that would remove barriers to improved effectiveness. This feedback will be intensive. It should be paced accordingly to critical incidents, both positive and negative, in the performance pattern and should not be paced by the calendar. Finally, the frequency of feedback should be primarily under the control of the performer. Questions should be answered and opportunities explored when the performer sees the need.

Given the intensive nature of the feedback requirements of a DAP and the scarcity of managerial time, probably not more than 10 to 15 percent of a manager's subordinates can realistically be developed with a DAP.

In the MAP, feedback should be primarily past oriented. The predominant emphasis is on maintaining the past pattern and level of performance. The essential theme is that "what has been is good enough for the future." Feedback is used to focus on the exceptions or deviations from an established pattern of stable, acceptable performance. The locus from which feedback is generated is the managerial control system. This may be either a superior or a technology, e.g. an accounting system or a quality control instrumentation. The performer in a MAP should not be expected to generate feedback about his/her performance as a part of the formal appraisal system. The essence of feedback in the MAP is that "no news is good news" to the performer and the underlying managerial

assumption is that change is unnecessary most of the time. The system should be designed to highlight exceptions but should not attempt to monitor the majority of employee behaviors or performances.

Feedback in the MAP is likely to be time-paced and of moderate amounts. That is, if there can ever be a case made for administrative convenience determining the timing of appraisals, it is with the MAP. On many of the jobs where MAP's are appropriate, the pace and quality of work is largely not under the control of the performer, i.e. technology and/or work flow determine these aspects of performance. The amount of feedback needed in the MAP is low relative to both the DAP and RAP. Only when major deviations from standard behavior patterns occur and upon the occasion of the timed paced reviews (e.g. once per year) is feedback likely to be an efficient strategy of control.

In most work environments, it is highly likely that 70 to 80 percent of the performers will be candidates for the MAP. Most work systems in medium and large organizations are, in fact, designed to assure that such is the case. This maximizes administrative efficiency and should focus managerial attention on the extremes of the performance distribution.

In the RAP, the evaluation and associated feedback focus on past performance. The only orientation toward the future is an emphasis upon the necessity for immediate demonstratable performance improvement. In addition the focus of the evaluation is on what, in the eyes of the superior, must be done to improve performance. The feedback should emphasize the exact, proper methods to be used to execute satisfactory performance. In addition, considerable detail needs to be provided concerning the specific deficiencies that exist. The feedback must be system generated, usually by the immediate superior of the RAtee with

possible inputs from functional specialists in personnel or technical specialties directly related to the nature of the task. Clearly, the implication of the RAP is that punitive action lurks and that unless measurable, tangible performance improvements are quickly forthcoming, termination is the likely outcome.

Nearly continuous monitoring and feedback of performance is required in a RAP. Feedback is intensive, certainly weekly, and frequently daily. Feedback is stretched only if performance improvements begin to appear and seem to be stabilized. Consideration can then be given to the advisability of shifting to a MAP. The desired goal of a RAP is performance improvement. Short of that attainment, an acceptable outcome would be the voluntary termination by the performer. Hopefully, no manager should expect more than 10 to 15 percent of his subordinates to need a RAP.

Conclusion

It seems clear that multiple performance problems, performance histories, and work situations require variations in appraisal systems. Yet, most of the available literature speaks in terms of single systems and does not suggest shifting systems of evaluation as performance varies across time and across performers. While I am not at all certain that administrative ease will be attained by the complexity of these three systems, I do propose that multiple systems to serve multiple purposes fit the realities of most organizations.

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Figure 1

Three Appraisal Systems

1. DAP = Development Action Program:

   Focused on proven high performer with upward potential.

2. MAP = Maintenance Action Program:

   Focused on acceptable performer with limited upward potential.

3. RAP = Remedial Action Program:

   Focused on substandard performer who requires close attention or who should be prepared for termination.

Figure 2

An Overview of Three Programs of Appraisal

(DAP, MAP, RAP)

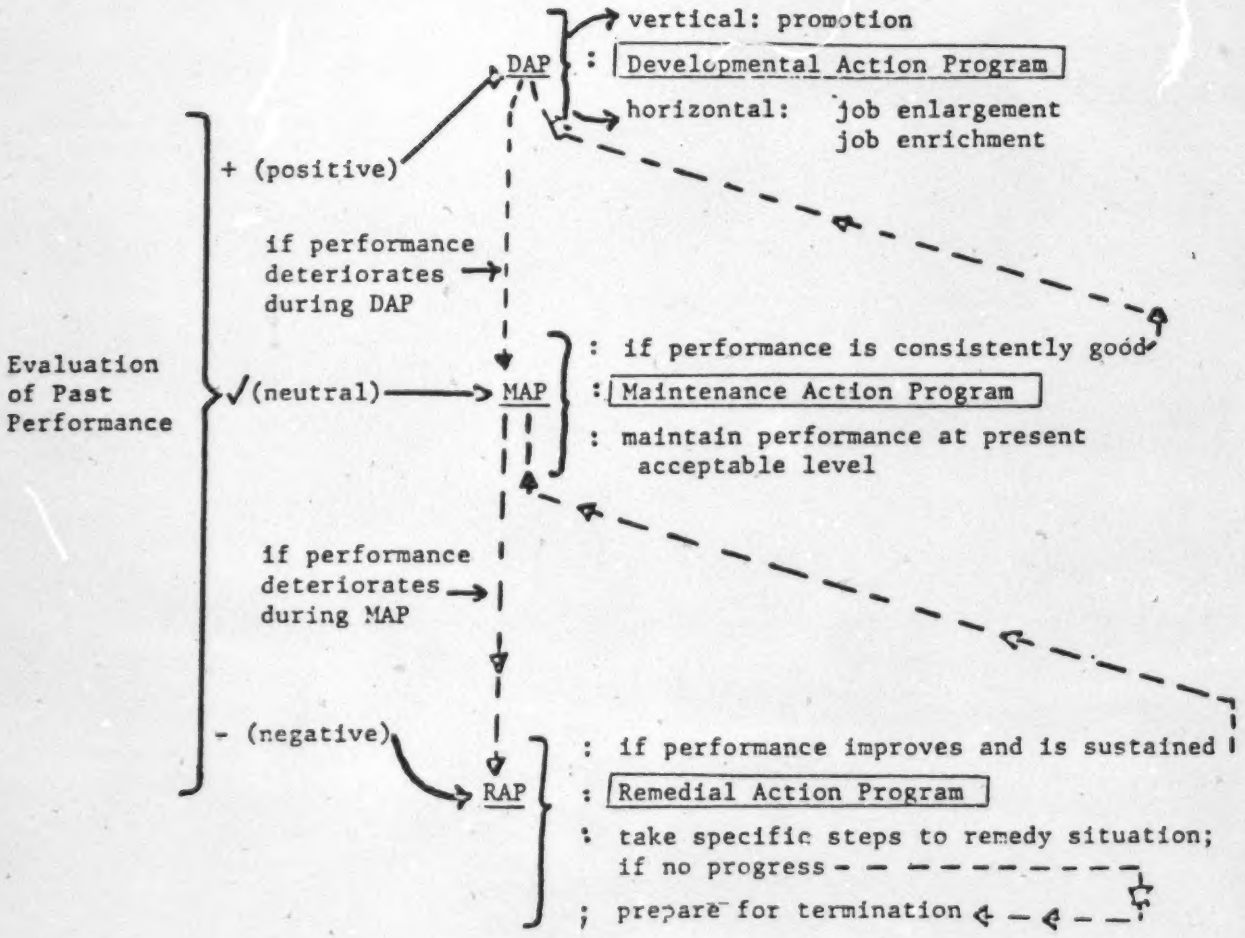

Figure 3

Appraisal Programs and Dimensions of Feedback

	Development Action Program	Maintenance Action Program	Remedial Action Program
Nature of Feedback	Future oriented Implied goals Self-generated Implies job scope expansion	Past oriented General-focus on exceptions System-generated Implies no change	Past oriented Detailed-focus on method System (boss) generated Implies punitive action
Amount and Frequency of Feedback	Task specific Intensive Feedback Frequency highly influenced by performer	Time paced Medium feedback	Nearly continuous monitoring Intensive feedback--decreasing frequency only if performance improves

Figure 2

An Overview of Three Programs of Appraisal

(DAP, MAP, RAP)